

## Writing-about-Writing Vs. Creating Writing Researchers

Illinois State University Writing Program, 2014

Writing-About-Writing	ISU Writing Program	Key Difference
<p>Students read writing research from scholars in the field, with the goal of raising awareness about writing as a complicated activity that involves disciplinary knowledge and research</p>	<p>Students may read some research in the field of Writing Studies, but they primarily read (and produce) “local” examples of Writing Research, which are published in our <i>Grassroots Writing Research Journal</i>.</p>	<p>Our goal is not only to create students who can recognize that writing can be researched, but that students are able to create flexible, repeatable strategies for investigating writing <i>AS THEY DO IT</i><sup>1</sup> in the world.</p>
<p>Students read about research methods for conducting research.</p>	<p>Students use the work of other student researchers, but they also spend time developing methods for conducting on-the-fly research into literate practice – for when they need these practices to <i>produce texts in the world</i>.</p>	<p>We love the exposure to research methods that is included in texts like Downs and Wardle’s <i>Writing About Writing</i>. However, we want students to see research not as something they do as a <i>student</i>, but as an activity that they accomplish daily, or whenever a new context for writing occurs. To achieve this, knowledge about scholarly research methods in our program is freely cannibalized in order to create on-the-fly research practices.</p>
<p>Students conduct limited original research, modeled after disciplinary methods and methodologies</p>	<p>Students conduct original research where they define not only the subject matter, but the generic conventions and the potential value of the research for projected audiences.</p>	<p>At first glance, there isn’t too much difference here. Ultimately, however, our program goal isn’t a student production that imitates and adapts to scholarly conventions (which might only be truly useful to students who move into the discipline), but the production of a “citizen-researcher” who can share knowledge about how writing works in the world while also working to build and maintain flexible knowledge structures that s/he can use in real world writing situations.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Actually this difference is primarily due to our interest in an Activity Theory approach to transfer, which is a critical aspect of our program. See Tuomi-Grohn and Engestrom (eds.) *Between School and Work: new perspectives on Transfer and boundary-crossing* (2003) for a useful discussion of the intersection of activity theory research and perspectives on knowledge transfer.

Overall, the difference key difference between our program and a Writing-about-Writing approach is that in WAW, students are introduced to a scholarly field and taught that they should have an interest in and awareness of the complexity of writing. As Downs and Wardle note, “Taking the research community of writing studies as our example not only allows writing instructors to bring their own expertise to the course, but also heightens students’ awareness that writing itself is a subject of scholarly inquiry. Students leave the course with increased awareness of writing studies as a discipline, as well as a new outlook on writing as a researchable activity rather than a mysterious talent” (559). Essentially, the WAW course is seen as a way of applying “writing studies” content to a class that is about academic reading and writing.

It is here that our program’s fundamental difference becomes more clear. In our program, students are immersed in “writing research” as daily, lived experience, and taught to identify situations in which their thinking and research skills can be used productively. Our goal is equip writers with specific kinds of research skills and ways of thinking about literate activity that will allow them to create personalized research plans for investigating their own writing practices and productions. One potential outcome (we hope) of this focus is that these kinds of skills, applied appropriately, have the potential to both aid knowledge transfer (moving knowledge about writing more adaptively between different situations) and create a more positive disposition towards adaptation as a key writing strategy.

Thus, our program’s focus on “Creating Writing Researchers” is a critical difference that separates us both ideologically and pedagogically from the Writing About Writing approach. And not only does it leads to these fundamental differences in curriculum, we’ve found that it impacts our attitudes about and practices of assessment in some fundamental ways as well.

### Three Foundational Components of the ISU Writing Program

**Genre Studies:** In the ISU Writing Program, we use the term “*genre*” to define one of the central topics study as writers and researchers, meaning that we study specific kinds of texts that are produced in specific locations, in response to specific conditions. ***We do not use the term genre to close off discussion of what a text is (or might be); rather, we use the concept of genre to indicate a complicated, always-in-motion relationship of a specific text to ways in which that text can be identified, defined, and used.*** Any textual production can be studied as a genre, through working to understand the boundaries within which it can be (and is) produced, distributed, and used. However, while we do use these boundaries to study genres with the aim of learning about them and producing them, we also want to study how they work to shape certain kinds of communicative exchanges and ways of thinking and being in the world. In the program at ISU, learning how to identify and recognize the ***complexity*** of genre relationships (which are cultural, social, and political as well as material), is an important step in the process of learning how to research and evaluate one’s own textual productions as specific responses to a set of evolving genre conventions in a particular place and time. We need to understand that our ability to produce texts in specific situations is governed by our knowledge and understanding of genre conventions; but also that our knowledge and understanding are never complete, because varying contextual circumstances can change how the genre will be understood and used by authors and readers in any particular setting.

**Activity Theory (specifically Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, or CHAT):** CHAT can’t be left out of any discussion of the goals of our program, because it deeply informs our approach to writing instruction design. CHAT forces us to think about all writing (all textual production) as occurring within a web of relationships between people, other texts, cultural practices, modes of communication, and non-human

actors.

Because activity theory (combined with attention to genre) can help us to “unpack” or make explicit the dynamic processes through which we gain knowledge about writing situations, it may also be able to help us to develop practical strategies for encountering new writing situations. Not every author needs to do this kind of deep analysis for every writing situation (research shows that all kinds of writing can be picked up through a process of immersion, without the writing even being fully aware of what he/she is learning to do). However, knowing how to take a “research-oriented” (and activity-theory oriented) approach to new writing situations can help us to see nuances and complications that we couldn’t previously see, even in situations where we thought we already “knew how to do it.”

**Research On Transfer:** The concept of “transfer” is related to the knowledge that, as literate individuals, we approach writing situations with prior knowledge of other writing situations, and this knowledge impacts the choices (conscious and unconscious) that we make. A key issue in Writing Studies theory currently, transfer research has serious implications for all aspects of developing and teaching in an introductory writing course. Thinking about transfer asks us to question whether the work we do to teach students about writing in such a course actually results in knowledge that students can use when engaged in writing activities outside of that course. Research in diverse fields (Writing Studies, Socio-Linguistics, English for Specific Purposes) has indicated that we can’t assume that this kind of knowledge transfer occurs. That is, we can’t assume that if we teach students how to write an “academic essay” with a thesis statement, that the same students would be able to understand how a lead works in a newspaper article, or even that they would recognize the lead and the thesis as corresponding elements that might be at work also (albeit differently) in other genres. Our program goals are designed to investigate whether a “writing research” focus can shift students’ ability to engage in the transfer of knowledge about writing to new writing situations. That is, if we can incorporate teaching practices that encourage authors to consider carefully the knowledge they are using when they work in a new writing setting, we hope that may be able to help them understand how to use (or not) that knowledge effectively.

## Participating in The Grassroots Literate Activity Database (GLAD)

The purpose of this research is to create an open database (a collection of stories about the details of people's writing experiences). The database can be used by researchers (of all kinds) to better understand what people **actually do** when they engage in different kinds of writing and composing in their daily lives. If you are willing to participate by sharing details about some kind of writing that you are (or have been) involved in, you can either choose to fill out an online survey, or have a face-to-face meeting with one of our researchers.

If you choose to participate, you can also choose what happens to the information you give us. You can decide to allow only the researchers directly involved with the project (through The Illinois State University Writing Program) to see and work with your information, or you can choose to allow your entry to become part of a public database – one that researchers, students, and writers of all kinds might use.

### **Literate Activity?** Don't you just mean **WRITING**?

Well, yeah. Kind of. We say **literate activity** instead of just **writing** because a **literate activity** can mean any kind of activity that a person (or people) do that includes writing in some way. So we're not just interested in activities where writing is the main focus – like writing an essay – but also activities like highlighting text in a book, or making a video or recording and producing music, or making a cat meme to put on your facebook page, or **sharing** someone else's cat meme on your facebook page.

Actually, we'd like to use the work "**inscription**", rather than writing, because we're interested in any process where people make marks of some kind on some kind of surface with the intent to create meaning for an audience. So making a shopping list on a stickie-note to take with you to the store, that would be something we'd be interested in -- or checking out a book from the library, or writing, "please wash me" in the dirt on someone's car window.

We also say **literate activity** because we want to consider all of the actions that are connected to the activity – so not just the parts that involve actually **writing**, but all the various kinds of doing, thinking and communicating that are involved.

Finally, we want to make it clear that a **literate activity** might include doing or making things that are primarily **verbal**, or **visual** or **sonic** – but we're most interested in these kinds of activities when they also include some kind of alphabetic text as well.

### **Why would I want to participate in this kind of research? Does it have any practical value for me?**

Actually, participating in this research does have practical value for you. Here are a couple of reasons why:

- (1) **It can help you to think about and remember what you've learned in a new writing situation.** Like athletes or actors watching film of their performances, talking through writing situations can help you see more clearly what you are actually doing when you write.
- (2) **It can help you to figure out how skills that you've learned in one writing situation might apply in other writing situations.** Like when you move into a new relationship or work situation, and you find yourself reviewing past relationships or work situations – using the past to help you think about what to do in the future.

- (3) **It can help you to document (and therefore remember) important skills that you've learned.** Like practicing your guitar, or your golf swing, or your sales pitch. Because writing is so complex, participating in this project can help you think about what skills you want to practice.
- (4) **It can make you feel good about yourself.** Firstly, it's just cool to be able to accurately describe a something you've done or learned. But also, in contributing to the database, you're helping us to gather a really wide range of stories about people engaging in all kinds of literate activities. This information can help us understand a lot more about how people become "specifically literate" – learning to do new kinds of writing in new situations. And that's just a cool thing to do with an hour of your time!

### If I decide to participate, what happens next?

If you decide you'd be willing to participate, you sign up by putting your email address, phone number, and signature here:

Name:

Email Address:

Phone Number

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

We can either arrange for you to have a face-to-face interview, or send you a link to our online questionnaire.

If you have questions about this project, you can contact:

**Joyce R. Walker**

**Phone: 727-543-6649**

**Email: reenste@gmail.com**

You can also direct questions or concerns to Research Ethics & Compliance Office at

**Research Ethics and Compliance Office Illinois State University**

**Phone: (309) 438-2529**

**Mailing address: Research Ethics and Compliance Office C/o Office of Research and Sponsored Programs**

**Hovey Hall 310**

**Campus Box 3040**

**Normal, IL 61790-3040**

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## Grassroots Literate Activity Database Questionnaire:

[Note: For face-to-face interviews, there will be an additional form to fill out, the online questionnaire will also include informational statements, and give the participant a chance to restrict his/her entry or make it open. Participants will need to be 18 years or older].

**Date of Birth:**

**Ethnicity (optional):** (choices + "other" will be listed)

**Gender:** (M,F, other):

**What's your relationship to school?**

- I'm currently in school (can select 2 yr, professional program, 4 yr college or university – Fr, So, Ju, Se, M.A. program, Ph.D. program,)

- I'm not currently in school, but...
  - I've graduate from high school
  - I've graduated from a two-year or professional training program
  - I've received a degree from a 4-year college or university
  - I've received post-graduate degree at the master's level
  - I've received a post-graduate degree at the ph.d. level

- (1) **How would you name the literate activity that you engaged in?**
- (2) **Would you list the activity as being... (can select more than one)**
  - Workplace related
  - School-related
  - Community-related
  - Social/entertainment
- (3) **How would you categorize the type of writing/composing that was produced?** *(See list of possible categories)*
- (4) **List the "genre or genres" of writing that were produced during the activity, and describe them in as much detail as you can:**
- (5) **List the tools (of any kind) that you can think of that were used during the production of the text(s), and describe how they were used:**
- (6) **List the people involved (in any way) in producing the text(s) and describe what they did.** [NOTE: *Please* don't use any names. For example, list "my mom" or "my roommate" or "my boss" or "the author" or "the photographer].
- (7) **List any kinds of research that was involved in the activity – that is, anything that the author/producer(s) didn't know and needed to find out.**
- (8) **As a participant in the activity, did you notice any other kinds of writing or writing skills that were specifically used by the authors/producers of the text(s)?** Please describe:
- (9) **Was there any part of this activity that was tangled, troublesome, difficult, or negative in any way?** (An example might be when technology doesn't work properly, or the authors don't have some knowledge they need to produce the text). Please describe:
- (10) **Who had the most "control" over this writing activity? Why do you think so?**
- (11) **What specific tool would you say was the most powerful in this activity? Why do you think so?**
- (12) **Describe the primary goals of this activity, included whether or not your think they were achieved – and how and why?**
- (13) **What are some of the things that someone else trying to produce this text might need to know?**
- (14) **Was there any knowledge or were there any skills that you gained through this activity that could be useful in some other kind of writing or literate activity?** Please describe:
- (15) **If you are willing to be contacted for additional questions, please let us know your email address.**

## Becoming a Writing Researcher: The Grassroots Literate Activity Database (GLAD)

The purpose of this research is create an open database (a collection of stories about the details of people’s writing experiences) that all kinds of researchers can use to better understand what people **actually do** when they engage in different kinds of writing and composing in their daily lives. Research Assistants for the GLAD are responsible for conducting face-to-face interviews with the participants. Although participants can choose to answer the questions online, they can also participate in face-to-face interviews. Because interviewers can add to the questions, and help participants think more fully about their answers, the interviewers can help us to create a richer, more complete set of data.

### What do interviewers need to do?

1. Firstly, we think that interviewers should add an entry to the database, to gain a better understanding of the questions, and the various ways they can be answered. The main handout for the GLAD explains how to participate by providing us with an entry.
2. Secondly, interviewers will need to complete the ISU ethics training for researchers. You’ll need to register at the CITI website: <https://www.citiprogram.org/> and take the basic training course. This will take several hours.
3. You’ll then need to take the ISU writing program’s training for becoming an associate research investigator for the project. These sessions last one hour, and will be offered throughout the semester in the Writing program space (Stevenson Hall, Room 133).

### What’s in it for me? Why would I want to be an interviewer?

Interviewers get to gain a great deal of experience in several key areas:

1. **You’ll learn how to conduct qualitative research interviews**, which is a skill that you may be able to transfer to lots of other work and school situations.
2. **You’ll get a chance to talk to other people about how they’ve learned to write in a whole range of different situations.** These kinds of interactions can definitely help you to become more aware of your own writing practices. So working as a writing researcher can actually help you to become a better (or at least more attentive) writer.
3. Although researchers aren’t paid for conducting interviews, **participating as a researcher in a large-scale research project like the GLAD can be an asset for your resume.**
4. **There are opportunities for paid internships.** There are different opportunities for paid internships with the ISU Writing Program, where researchers can learn to work analyze the content of the database in different ways. Work can involve qualitative coding, but might also involve other kinds of analysis. Acting as a associate research investigator is a prerequisite for these paid positions
5. **It can make you feel good about yourself.** Even more than submitting an entry to the database, participating as a researcher is helping to gather a really wide range of stories about people engaging in all kinds of literate activities. This information can help us learn a lot about how people learn how to be “specifically literate” – to do new kinds of writing in new situations. It’s a bigger commitment than just submitting an entry, but **still** a cool thing to do with your time!

# Program Wide Assessment Summary

ENG 145 (fall 2013) and ENG 101 (spring 2014)  
Illinois State University Writing Program, 2014

## General Description:

The ISU Writing Program is designed to teach students concepts and techniques for writing in different kinds of situations and genres. Thus, our curriculum focuses on the learning and adaptation of these concepts and techniques, along with efforts to help students understand exactly how these skills can apply to their work as writers in different genres. Students in Writing Program courses investigate (in great detail) their own productions, learning to observe and assess their writing as it transforms in different settings at the same time as they learn techniques for producing effective writing in these different settings. While we do not expect that students will be able to employ these skills to create “perfect” (or nearly-perfect) productions by the end of the semester, we do expect that students will be able to make choices that are intelligent and that use observational and background research data to adapt their writing to new situations. We also expect that they will be able to assess, to some degree, how their productions do (or don’t) conform to the requirements of particular writing situations.

The ISU program-wide assessment is designed to allow all members of the Writing Program (including students) to assess how primary concepts are being taken up and used in our ENG 101 and ENG 145 classrooms. It is also designed to allow the Writing Program to review and assess (1) students’ ability to think critically about writing and how it works, (2) their ability to engage in rigorous exploration of different kinds of literate situations, and (3) their ability to assess their own productions for correctness and appropriateness for the genre/situations in which they are writing. Finally, it allows us to highlight concepts and skills that we may want to focus on more specifically in future semesters of the course.

The **general goal** of our program-wide assessment is then to observe and assess both the research and critical thinking skills that students use as they confront new writing situations, the choices these students make vis-à-vis the genres they are working to investigate.

## Assessment Design:

The assessment is designed as an exercise in “problem-solving.” Students participate in groups to respond to **writing scenarios** that require certain kinds of skills at researching and making decisions about content and structure of particular genres, in response to particular literate situations. We are interested in the *entire process* of how students respond to these scenarios, so students are asked to show their work as they solve the scenario.

## Sample Scenarios:

Although we ultimately developed over 70 scenarios, these three examples offer a general sense of the content (and range) of the scenarios:

### 68. World of Warcraft Raiding Group

You are an avid player of the online game World of Warcraft. The newest update of the game has created a new dungeon that requires twenty players to complete. You want to complete the dungeon and decided to recruit other players to join you. You know plenty of other players in the game, but do not know these people in real life. Therefore, you can only relay information to the people through chatting with them in the game and through a website you have created.

Your tasks:

- Decide on a date and time to attempt the dungeon.
- Create a method to invite other plays to participate in your event.
- Create a roster to keep track of what players are attending and what their jobs are during the event.



## 66. United Nations Resolution

Kuwait has just announced that they are implementing a plan to medically examine foreigners in their country in order to determine if they are homosexual. The Kuwaiti government has issued a statement saying that any foreigner deemed to be homosexual will be deported and banned from re-entering the country. The United Nations Human Rights Council is concerned that if Kuwait goes through with this plan, there will be dangerous consequences for all non-citizens in the country. As the leader of this council, it is up to you to develop a diplomatic plan to dissuade Kuwait from following through on the plan.

Your tasks:

- Research Kuwait and the UN Human Rights Council.
- Develop a realistic plan to convince the Kuwaiti government to rethink this plan.
- Create a product in the necessary genre(s).

## 12. Employee Complaint Report

You are the human resources representative in medium-sized sales office. Two members of the sales staff, Duncan and Kurt, are constantly getting into arguments and purposely antagonizing each other. When you arrived at work today, you were surprised to find Kurt waiting for you at your desk. He wants help writing a formal complaint letter to send to the corporate office because Duncan filled all his desk drawers with shredded paper.

Your tasks:

- Find at least two examples of complaint letters.
- Determine all the details of incident being reported including dates and times.
- Draft and finalize the letter.

## Assessment Reports:

Student groups were asked to complete reports about their work (which allowed us to better see their research and thinking processes).

### Report 1: Genre Research, Analysis and Production

Please report on the work that your group did to select the genre you are using for your production. Be as detailed as possible in your descriptions, and be sure to note where different members of the group did different work (but don't use names). Your report should be in paragraph form (with headers), and you should include the following sections:

1. **Researching & Analyzing Genres:** In this report, your group will need to explain in detail the activities you engaged in as you worked to research and analyze the writing that you did. Your description should include – as much as possible – all of the activities you engaged in when trying to make decisions about what genres to use, what those genres might look like and how you learned to understand the genre well enough to produce it.
2. **Using Research Genres:** Please provide *very specific* and *detailed* explanations of how you used your research and analysis in *specific* aspects of the composing process. Citing from your research and analysis report and then referring to specific parts of your actual production would be an ideal way to create a more complete report.
3. **Antecedent Genres:** Please list and discuss any kinds of writing that your group members already knew about that came into play as you worked on this scenario. What did you know how to do that you could use? Did you find that any of the writing you already know how to do “got in the way” when you were creating this production? Explain in as much detail as you can. One important aspect of this report will be to note any negotiations the group had to engage in to make decisions about whose knowledge to use.

**4. Bibliography of Source Material with Notes:** Please include a bibliography – a list of all the sources you used to do your genre research). For each source, please include a short explanation of how you used the various sources you found to better understand the genre.

**Report 2: Content Research (note: Some scenarios might not require this report. If you're not sure, check with your instructor)**

If this scenario required content research (that is, looking up information about a topic that you didn't already know about), please submit a report explaining how you went about doing that research in as much detail as possible, and be sure to note places where different members of the group had different opinions. Your report should have the following sections:

1. **Finding Sources:** Please explain the methods you used to find the sources you found. How did you go about searching?
2. **Useful Sources:** How did you figure out which sources would be useful? Please give at least one example with significant details: Why was this a useful source? How did you decide it was useful?
3. **Credible/Authoritative:** How did you decide which sources were credible? Please give at least one example with significant details: What information did you use to decide if the source was credible?
4. **List of Sources With Notes:** Please include a bibliography – a list of all the sources you used to do content research) with short explanations that detail how you used the various sources you found in the final product you produced.

**Report 3: Considering the complex setting – or activity system – in which your scenario is embedded**

Many instructors use terms from *Cultural-Historical Activity Theory* to help students think about how complex writing situations can be (how all kinds of factors can influence what and how texts are produced and received). However, even if your instructor doesn't use these terms – or even if you felt like you didn't fully understand them – you can still discuss your understanding of this scenario as a complex, complicated activity that included a lot of decision-making. Your Report should include the following sections:

1. **Understanding the scenario:** What were some of the most complicated aspects of understanding how to respond to this scenario?
2. **Questions you needed to answer:** What were some of the questions your group asked and answered? Which questions were the most difficult and how did you resolve them (as a group)?
3. **Knowledge, writing tools and planning:** What knowledge or writing tools did you draw on to complete the response? Did you have to learn how to do anything new? Explain how you first envisioned this text, and whether that representation changed (and how it changed) as you worked.
4. **Ethical and cultural considerations:** What kinds of ethical and cultural considerations did you make as you worked through this scenario?
5. **Ecology and trajectory:** Explain your understanding of the environment in which this text would/might exist. Who would use it? How would it be used? Could it be used in any ways you didn't envision?
6. **How could this text be received:** What are some of the unexpected ways that your texts could, hypothetically, be responded to? How might it cause trouble or solve problems?

**Part 4: The Production**

Please upload a copy of your production.

**Additional Documents:** In addition to uploading your actual textual production, please upload any additional documents that you feel would help us to understand how your group went about solving the scenario you were given (e.g. notes, drawings, etc.). In order to upload material, you'll need to save it into a single document and upload that document here. These documents can be no more than 2 MB in size.

### Report 5: Group Evaluation of the Production

This part of the Assessment includes your honest analysis of how well your group answered the problem posed by the scenario. Remember that no grade is assessed for how “well” you did the production, but we will be closely examining how well you can describe and defend the choices that you made. Your report should be organized (generally) in paragraph form, using the following headers:

1. **Group Evaluation of the Production:** Please provide an evaluation of how well *your production* matches up with what the Assessment Scenario asked you to produce. You’ll need to consider the overall effectiveness of the text in relation to the scenarios and to the sample/master texts that were used to produce it. How would you rank your production (excellent, very good, less than successful, or unsuccessful)? Please use examples from the text to support your ranking. We’d also really like to know if the group is in agreement about this ranking. Were there any dissenting opinions about the ranking, and why? **Please remember:** We are *most* interested in your ability to *accurately assess the production*. So it’s much more important to support the ranking you decide on than it would be to just select a high ranking.
2. **Genre Knowledge and Antecedent Genres:** Please list any kinds of writing knowledge (specific writing experiences or knowledge about genres) that group members used as you were composing. How useful was this knowledge? Were there any times when it wasn’t useful?
3. **Grammar and Style, Citation and Formatting:** Please discuss specific examples of choices you made to make sure that what you produced for production genre would be appropriate. For example, if you ended up having to cite information, how did you do that, and why did you do it that way? How careful were you to make your style and grammar match the genre, and what did you have to do to do that? Were there visual design or formatting choices you had to make, and how did you make them? Did you feel like you needed to carefully proofread to make sure that the sentence structures were in line with “standard grammar and syntax?” If not, why not, and how was the language that you used different? Please provide as many examples as you can.

### Program Learning Outcomes:

Although we designed the scenarios to be fairly “open” documents, lending themselves to a range of qualitative and quantitative analyses, we did include analysis that looked specifically at our program’s learning outcomes.

- **Identifying Genres:** This generally includes the ability to figure out the “requirements” or “boundaries” of particular kinds of writing one has been asked (or has decided to) produce. It includes the ability to find examples of the genre (when possible) and to do close analysis of the features of the genre vis-à-vis other genres (similar and dissimilar) and in relation to the antecedent genres that an author might be able to use to understand the new situation.
- **Creating Content** (within a genre or for a setting): This generally includes the ability to fit one’s content into the setting/genre. What have the authors left out? What have they included? How does one’s research about the topic support and shape the content one produces, and how is one’s research shaped by the requirements of the writing genre or setting? Does the group’s ability to create and shape their content reflect a clear understanding of the requirements of the genre and setting?
- **Awareness of Language Conventions:** This will include analysis of grammar and syntax patterns students use. Matches in grammar and syntax to the conventions of the genre will be reviewed as well as a potential mis-matches.
- **Flexible Research Skills:** This skill is generally about knowing where to look and how to look for information, as well as how to document what one finds when researching. We’ve divided this category more fully into (a) **genre research** – or the tactics for finding out about and investigating genres and settings; and (b) **content research** – or the ability to find content materials that support a particular writing task.
- **Citation and Citing:** This includes not only general knowledge of academic citation practices but knowledge of the different ways that citation can work in different genres and settings: making choices about how to cite, knowledge about how to cite “correctly” in different settings, and knowledge about how to analyze genres and settings to determine appropriate citation practices.

- **Discourse Communities:** Generally, this knowledge includes the ability to examine how groups of people who produce and use texts in particular settings understand and enact those productions and uses. Understanding discourse communities is not simply about understanding the “audience” for one’s text. Instead, it’s a way of investigating how institutions and genres can be formed and supported by groups of people all doing things together in certain ways.
- **Trajectory:** This term is related to temporally rich understandings of the different ways that texts “make meaning in time.” It means having a nuanced understanding of the ways that texts come into being and the ways that their production and distribution can diverge (sometimes dramatically) among different instances of genres or over time.
- **Technologies and Modalities:** This term relates to the ability to consider how different technologies for production and different modes of production (graphic, alphabetic, aural, oral, etc.) impact literate productions.
- **Globalization, Cultural Contexts & Diversity:** This term relates to the ability to consider complex contingencies that impact particular genres and settings of writing with regard specifically to cultural/geographical/social/technological differences.
- **Ethics:** The ability to consider possible ethical complications of producing writing in various literate settings – and the ability to make decisions about how to deal with these issues.
- **Terms and Concepts:** This involves the use of specific program terms and concepts (we’ll create a specific list) related to our Writing Program pedagogy. It is not that we are looking for students to be able to use all of the terms, but that we are interested in examining what terms they do use, and how terms are used. We’ll also be looking for the use of terms **not** on the list, but which relate to concepts we are interested in.
- **Disposition:** This will be a review that involves the reviewer developing an overall sense of how students are taking up skills, terms and concepts in terms of their personal identities. Some markers that we might be looking for could include:
  - Language that illustrates how students are considering themselves as researchers (both for genre analysis and for content)
  - Language that illustrates student attitudes towards the activities of research (esp. genre research)
  - Language that illustrates how/if students are making connections between the research they are doing and “ownership” of their own productions in different settings
  - Anything that might point to “intent” or “ability” to use learned skills in a range of literate settings beyond the classroom.

# Instructor Workshop Handout

Illinois State University Writing Program, 2014

One of the key ways that we want to bring the data from our assessment back into circulation within our program is to use it for more than just making decisions at the administrative level or even creating a report that documents finding for instructors. Therefore, we've planned a "Workshop and Syllabus Revision" day-long workshop<sup>2</sup> for fall 2014. At this workshop, we'll be able to ask instructors to review our findings, do some coding and discussion of their own with the sample data, and use the data to discuss necessary changes to their courseplans.

**Overview of the Fall 2014 Instructor Workshop and Syllabus Revision:** As we work through the assessment data this semester, we're planning for an event designed to allow instructors to both consider the data and to consider how the data can be used to influence their course plans. Your "Instructor Workshop" handout explains how the workshop will be organized:

- We'll send instructors a short, summary report on the most important findings, from the data prior to the beginning of the semester (this is one of the reasons we like to do these larger workshops in fall. We have a professional development day at the beginning of each semester, but in spring it's more difficult to get instructors to read during the winter break). Our report will include samples from the assessment marked up to show particular categories that we think should cause us to rethink or strengthen our practice.<sup>3</sup>
- We'll also include segments of the raw data (both examples of complete assessments and raw data that we've gathered from our qualitative and quantitative analyses), organized to allow instructors to review and discuss for themselves both the methods through which we've come to our findings, and potentially alternative ways that that data might be used.
- As a group, we'll talk about the findings. Then instructors will be invited to participate in small working groups, which will be focused around specific aspects of the assessment findings, in order to discuss how they handle these issues in their own classrooms.
- Ultimately our goal for this day-long workshop event will be for each instructor to present a course plan that explicitly (we use the comment feature in MS word for this) outlines their personalized response to the findings from the data.

## Workshop Agenda

<b>8:30-9:00:</b>	Program Announcements (what's new!)
<b>9:00-9:30:</b>	Review of Findings from Program Coalescence and our Program-Wide Assessment
<b>9:30-9:40</b>	break
<b>9:40-10:45</b>	Presentations on key pedagogy Issues outlined in the assessment (these will be presentations by instructors that we've identified as particularly adepts at key skills and concepts that we want to encourage)
<b>10:45-12:00</b>	Instructors will have pre-registered to participate in groups according to issue they are willing (or feel they need) to discuss. These groups will spend this session reviewing the "data packets" we provide, and discuss the issue that they've agree to focus on.

<sup>2</sup> We have these day-long workshops at the beginning of each semester. So our use of this data actually fits in with our overall professional development strategies.

<sup>3</sup> We'll also be including results from "coalescence polls" that we do each semester. In many cases, the self-reported information from teachers about the various key aspects of their teaching match up well with the data from the assessment reports.

<b>12:00-1:00</b>	Lunch
<b>1:00-2:30</b>	Again in small groups, the instructors will work to discuss exactly what changes they will be making in their course plans.
<b>2:30-3:30</b>	Instructors will produce a document that offers an example (a course plan or project or set of activities) that highlights what they've agreed on as a response to the assessment findings on their issue.
<b>3:30-4:00</b>	Ice Cream Social (and evaluations).

# Assessment Data in the Classroom

Illinois State University Writing Program

[NOTE: this handout is incomplete – our complete handout will offer a short explanation of the assessment, along with a brief explanation of how qualitative coding works].

**Part 1:** Here are some examples of quantitative data that we gathered from the 2013/2014 Program-Wide assessment. First take a look at the two sample assessments. What can you ascertain from looking at them? How do the answers to the questions for each report seem to be answered by the authors? What can you observe about the match-up between what the authors say in the reports and the product they produce?

[Note: The average assessment is 6-7 pages, single-spaced, so we can't reproduce it here. But if you visit our blog post with the materials from this presentation, we've provided several sample assessments].

**Part 2:** This sample involves a comparison of the assessment reports that were rated "average" vs. those that were rated "exemplary" by ISU instructors. What can you learn from this information? Does it seem like "common sense"? When you look at the list of things the "exemplary assessment report have in common" do you think it matches up with what you observed during you're your own observations of the sample assessments.

## Statistical Data:

### Exemplary

Average Number of Sources: 6

Average Length of Reports: 675 words

Average number of terms<sup>4</sup>: 1 term per every 210 words, 14 total terms per group

Frequency of terms: Terms used most often in report 1 and report 5

Most used terms: Genre, audience, production and trajectory

### Average

Average Number of Sources: 4

Average Length of Reports: 400

Average number of terms: 1 term per every 250 words, 10 total terms per group

Frequency of terms: Terms used most often in report 1 and report 5

Most used terms: Genre, audience and trajectory

What the exemplary assessment responses have in common:

- Using terms more often in their reports than average
- More likely to use complicated terms/concepts like CHAT or Activity Theory
- Ability to thoroughly explore trajectories, both the intended and unintended
- Robust research practices that evolved as students progressed through the project
- Detailed reports of 500 words or more that explore specific steps or thought processes
- At least 6 varied credible sources

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<sup>4</sup> These the terms that we searched for a key writing program concepts and terms that can be found on our website.

**Part III:**

After considering the potential comparisons between the samples that we provided for you, try “re-looking” at the samples and thinking about ways to “code” the information there. Below we’ve offered an example of one kind of qualitative analysis that we did. However, if the groups have found other interesting aspects in their reviews of the sample, they may want to code for other information

**Possible way to code the samples:**

- We used four different colors of highlighters for our coding process:
  - PINK: discussions of genre research
  - ORANGE: discussions of activity theory
  - BLUE: the ability to CONNECT the research and thinking to the actual production;
  - YELLOW: Interesting example of content research.
- We also marked evidence of problematic grammar or style when we saw them.
- When we finished with each sample, we wrote up notes indicating our overall impressions of each sample. We included any particular points we wanted to make. For example, in one of our samples we noticed that they were not actually answering the questions of each report, but that they did talk about different elements in different reports.



# Library Collaboration Information

Illinois State University Writing Program, 2014

## How to Use the Reports

The library has provided us with three different reports on student research practices that may be of use to you as you integrate robust research into your course plans. The three reports are listed below with accompanying examples. When working with students to analyze these reports, it makes sense to start with the data. The data isn't explained in great detail, which is deliberate. It can be confusing to start by looking at just a bunch of numbers or a chart -- and it can take a moment, and some help, to begin to see the underlying organizational structure.

**Step One:** Look at the data! Remember the context. The library has been working with us to collect data about our students (and students in COM110). Students have been asked questions, and asked to complete tasks that relate to what the library calls "information fluency."

## What can we know, to start?

- We can know that the questions (see Appendix one for a list of all the questions that were asked) were supposed to get at what students **know** about researching. That probably means that someone, somewhere (or maybe many someones) think that students **don't know** a lot about doing research, or maybe that they **think they know** some things but that those things are kind of messed up. That's the beginning of this looking.
- We can see that the article or report (**the explanations or observations**) that might surround this data is missing (or are they?), so that means the reader needs to think about why the questions were asked in the first place, why this data was selected and organized in this way, and ultimately what it might tell us about student knowledge about doing research.

## Some Questions to Ask:

- **What can you learn by looking at the sheet?** The information might be organized differently that you're used to. Can you figure out what's going on here?
- **Some Questions about the basic information:** Who completed the research? How many students participated? Can you tell how the data was gathered?
- **The Word Count Data:** Do you understand this data chart? What is it telling you? Why would word count be interesting here? How was this data compiled? What are some interesting data points you observe?**The First Assessment Question:** What seems interesting about the way that this data is organized? Who made the decisions to categorize it in this way? What do the answers tell you about how students understand the research process?
- **The 2<sup>nd</sup> Assessment Question:** How is this question different from the first assessment question? What do the answers to the question tell us about how ISU students search for information?

## Other Activities:

- **Highlighting:** Once you've begun to figure out what the data are actually representing, you can begin to categorize and sort the information – Notice that some sorting (minimal, moderate, and robust) has already been done. Do you agree with the sorting? What do responses tell you about what student research knowledge?
- **Where does it get complicated?:** Is there one right way to search? To think about sources? Try using highlighters (WP has a giant box of these down in 133) to mark up the responses. Folks can work in groups to decide what to mark up and how to different color highlighters can be used to mark different kinds of responses.

- **The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly:** Although we don't want to denigrate the intellectual skills of the participants in this study, it's interesting to try to decide what the "best" answers are. What answers seem most problematic?
- **What does this teach me?** Through looking at this data, we can all ask ourselves what skills we possess. As a way to documenting our own knowledge, everyone could draw up a list of things they think they "know" about researching – plus a list of things they feel like they don't know (or they find confusing). These can then become part of some "proof-of-learning" documents later on in the semester.

## Word Count Chart (drawn from the answers to Questions 1 & 2)

### Word Count

	Describe Selecting a Topic				How and where would you search		
	#1	#2	#3		#1	#2	#3
Research	684	204	59	Research	289	144	15
Find more info*	6	0	1	Search	792	187	64
Search online	9	1	3	Google	258	237	19
Search	359	48	30	Online	569	213	49

**Assessment Question #1:** (students were asked to respond to the following prompt)  
*The 2011 Japan earthquake and tsunami has brought to the forefront many issues and controversies. For your class you are doing a project that focuses on and investigates one of these issues or controversies. You will be required to convey your findings to your Instructor and classmates.*

### Minimal Response

Describe how you would go about deciding what issue or controversy to investigate?	Once you've decided what your issue or controversy is, where and how would you search for information to complete the project?
I would brainstorm.	Google.com
I would start with the most important issue and then move on from there.	I would utilize the most reliable researches such as new networks

### Moderate Response

I would do a little bit of research on each of the issues and decide which one of them interests me most. Then decide.	I would go to google and search the topic, since it was a recent event I would also search the topic in various newspapers.
I would search for examples on Japan's earthquake and tsunami past records to compare the controversies cause by these natural disasters	I would most likely use google search engine to find my research on my issue by typing in the name and reading up on the information I find.

**Assessment Question #2:** (students were asked to report about how they searched for three different types of texts -- they were not given specific instructions on how to search)

<b>Finding a non-fiction text:</b>	<b>Finding a fiction text:</b>	<b>Finding a text published prior to 1911:</b>
I went on the milner library website and typed the book title in the search box then the page comes up showing its availability and where it is in the library.	I go to google and type in famine in the horn of Africa then I look at the links and I chose one from msnbc.com because I know it would be reliable because they are a news network	I go to google and type in history of Illinois State University and the first link is a page fromilstu.edu about ISU's history
To try to find the book I would go on the Milner Library website and search on the main screen under the book tab. Or I would go into the Library and ask a librarian for some help on looking for a book.	I would use the Research & Catalog under the shortcuts. Then I would try to find the database that would be best to find information on the topic.	I would most likely see a librarian, because I would not know how to find it. I could try using the database or use the search engine on the Milner Library page.

### Pre-and-Post Assessment Survey of Student Attitudes toward Citations and Bibliographies

Question: Most college projects require citing sources and creating a bibliography. Select the reason why students are expected to do this.

	<b>Fall 2011 Pre Responses</b>		<b>Fall 2011 Post 1 Responses</b>		<b>Spring 2012 Post 2 Responses</b>	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%

Professors require it even though it isn't necessary because everything is on the web.	29	1%	10	1%	2	1%
<i>Credible research builds upon and acknowledges other researchers' work.</i>	1769	86%	936	88%	150	92%
The main goal of research is to cite the work of other scholars	261	13%	121	11%	11	7%
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>2059</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1067</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>100%</b>